

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

BEAUCHAMP'S
CAREER,
VOLUME 6

George Meredith

Beauchamp's Career. Volume 6

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Beauchamp's Career – Volume 6

CHAPTER XLII

THE TWO PASSIONS

The foggy February night refreshed his head, and the business of fetching the luggage from the hotel—a commission that necessitated the delivery of his card and some very commanding language—kept his mind in order. Subsequently he drove to his cousin Baskett's Club, where he left a short note to say the house was engaged for the night and perhaps a week further. Concise, but sufficient: and he stated a hope to his cousin that he would not be inconvenienced. This was courteous.

He had taken a bed at Renee's hotel, after wresting her boxes from the vanquished hotel proprietor, and lay there, hearing the clear sound of every little sentence of hers during the absence of Rosamund: her 'Adieu,' and the strange 'Do you think so?' and 'I know where I am; I scarcely know more.' Her eyes and their darker lashes, and the fitful little sensitive dimples of a smile without joy, came with her voice, but hardened to an aspect unlike her. Not a word could he recover of what she had spoken before Rosamund's intervention. He fancied she must have related details of her journey. Especially there must have been mention, he thought, of her drive to the station from Tourdestelle; and this flashed on him the scene of his ride to the chateau, and the meeting her on the road, and the white light on the branching river, and all that was Renee in the spirit of the place she had abandoned for him, believing in him. She had proved that she believed in him. What in the name of sanity had been the meaning of his language? and what was it between them that arrested him and caused him to mumble absurdly of 'doing best,' when in fact he was her bondman, rejoiced to be so, by his pledged word? and when she, for some reason that he was sure she had stated, though he could recollect no more than the formless hideousness of it, was debarred from returning to Tourdestelle?

He tossed in his bed as over a furnace, in the extremity of perplexity of one accustomed to think himself ever demonstrably in the right, and now with his whole nature in insurrection against that legitimate claim. It led him to accuse her of a want of passionate warmth, in her not having supplicated and upbraided him—not behaving theatrically, in fine, as the ranting pen has made us expect of emergent ladies that they will naturally do. Concerning himself, he thought commendably, a tear would have overcome him. She had not wept. The kaleidoscope was shaken in his fragmentary mind, and she appeared thrice adorable for this noble composure, he brutish.

Conscience and reason had resolved to a dead weight in him, like an inanimate force, governing his acts despite the man, while he was with Renee. Now his wishes and waverings conjured up a semblance of a conscience and much reason to assure him that he had done foolishly as well as unkindly, most unkindly: that he was even the ghastly spectacle of a creature attempting to be more than he can be. Are we never to embrace our inclinations? Are the laws regulating an old dry man like his teacher and guide to be the same for the young and vigorous?

Is a good gift to be refused? And this was his first love! The brilliant Renee, many-hued as a tropic bird! his lady of shining grace, with her sole fault of want of courage devotedly amended! his pupil, he might say, of whom he had foretold that she must come to such a pass, at the same time prefixing his fidelity. And he was handing her over knowingly to one kind of wretchedness—'son amour, mon ami,' shot through him, lighting up the gulfs of a mind in wreck;—and one kind of happiness could certainly be promised her!

All these and innumerable other handsome pleadings of the simulacra of the powers he had set up to rule, were crushed at daybreak by the realities in a sense of weight that pushed him mechanically

on. He telegraphed to Roland, and mentally gave chase to the message to recall it. The slumberer roused in darkness by the relentless insane-seeming bell which hales him to duty, melts at the charms of sleep, and feels that logic is with him in his preference of his pillow; but the tireless revolving world outside, nature's pitiless antagonist, has hung one of its balances about him, and his actions are directed by the state of the scales, wherein duty weighs deep and desireability swings like a pendant doll: so he throws on his harness, astounded, till his blood quickens with work, at the round of sacrifices demanded of nature: which is indeed curious considering what we are taught here and there as to the infallibility of our august mother. Well, the world of humanity had done this for Beauchamp. His afflicted historian is compelled to fling his net among prosaic similitudes for an illustration of one thus degradedly in its grip. If he had been off with his love like the rover! why, then the Muse would have loosened her lap like May showering flower-buds, and we might have knocked great nature up from her sleep to embellish his desperate proceedings with hurricanes to be danced over, to say nothing of imitative spheres dashing out into hurly-burly after his example.

Conscious rectitude, too, after the pattern of the well-behaved Aeneas quitting the fair bosom of Carthage in obedience to the Gods, for an example to his Roman progeny, might have stiffened his backbone and put a crown upon his brows. It happened with him that his original training rather imposed the idea that he was a figure to be derided. The approval of him by the prudent was a disgust, and by the pious tasteless. He had not any consolation in reverting to Dr. Shrapnel's heavy Puritanism. On the contrary, such a general proposition as that of the sage of Bevisham could not for a moment stand against the pathetic special case of Renee: and as far as Beauchamp's active mind went, he was for demanding that Society should take a new position in morality, considerably broader, and adapted to very special cases.

Nevertheless he was hardly grieved in missing Renee at Rosamund's breakfast-table. Rosamund informed him that Madame de Rouaillout's door was locked. Her particular news for him was of a disgraceful alarm raised by Captain Baskett in the night, to obtain admission; and of an interview she had with him in the early morning, when he subjected her to great insolence. Beauchamp's attention was drawn to her repetition of the phrase 'mistress of the house.' However, she did him justice in regard to Renee, and thoroughly entered into the fiction of Renee's visit to her as her guest: he passed over everything else.

To stop the mouth of a scandal-monger, he drove full speed to Cecil's Club, where he heard that the captain had breakfasted and had just departed for Romfrey Castle. He followed to the station. The train had started. So mischief was rolling in that direction.

Late at night Rosamund was allowed to enter the chill unlighted chamber, where the unhappy lady had been lying for hours in the gloom of a London Winter's daylight and gaslight.

'Madame de Rouaillout is indisposed with headache,' was her report to Beauchamp.

The conventional phraseology appeased him, though he saw his grief behind it.

Presently he asked if Renee had taken food.

'No: you know what a headache is,' Rosamund replied.

It is true that we do not care to eat when we are in pain.

He asked if she looked ill.

'She will not have lights in the room,' said Rosamund.

Piecemeal he gained the picture of Renee in an image of the death within which welcomed a death without.

Rosamund was impatient with him for speaking of medical aid. These men!

She remarked very honestly:

'Oh, no; doctors are not needed.'

'Has she mentioned me?'

'Not once.'

'Why do you swing your watch-chain, ma'am?' cried Beauchamp, bounding off his chair.

He reproached her with either pretending to indifference or feeling it; and then insisted on his privilege of going up-stairs-accompanied by her, of course; and then it was to be only to the door; then an answer to a message was to satisfy him.

'Any message would trouble her: what message would you send?' Rosamund asked him.

The weighty and the trivial contended; no fitting message could be thought of.

'You are unused to real suffering—that is for women!—and want to be doing instead of enduring,' said Rosamund.

She was beginning to put faith in the innocence of these two mortally sick lovers. Beauchamp's outcries against himself gave her the shadows of their story. He stood in tears—a thing to see to believe of Nevil Beauchamp; and plainly he did not know it, or else he would have taken her advice to him to leave the house at an hour that was long past midnight. Her method for inducing him to go was based on her intimate knowledge of him: she made as if to soothe and kiss him compassionately.

In the morning there was a flying word from Roland, on his way to England. Rosamund tempered her report of Renee by saying of her, that she was very quiet. He turned to the window.

'Look, what a climate ours is!' Beauchamp abused the persistent fog. 'Dull, cold, no sky, a horrible air to breathe! This is what she has come to! Has she spoken of me yet?'

'No.'

'Is she dead silent?'

'She answers, if I speak to her.'

'I believe, ma'am,' said Beauchamp, 'that we are the coldest-hearted people in Europe.'

Rosamund did not defend us, or the fog. Consequently nothing was left for him to abuse but himself. In that she tried to moderate him, and drew forth a torrent of self-vituperation, after which he sank into the speechless misery he had been evading; until sophisticated fancy, another evolution of his nature, persuaded him that Roland, seeing Renee, would for love's sake be friendly to them.

'I should have told you, Nevil, by the way, that the earl is dead,' said Rosamund.

'Her brother will be here to-day; he can't be later than the evening,' said Beauchamp. 'Get her to eat, ma'am; you must. Command her to eat. This terrible starvation!'

'You ate nothing yourself, Nevil, all day yesterday.'

He surveyed the table. 'You have your cook in town, I see. Here's a breakfast to feed twenty hungry families in Spitalfields. Where does the mass of meat go? One excess feeds another. You're overdone with servants. Gluttony, laziness, and pilfering come of your host of unmanageable footmen and maids; you stuff them, and wonder they're idle and immoral. If—I suppose I must call him the earl now, or Colonel Halkett, or any one of the army of rich men, hear of an increase of the income-tax, or some poor wretch hints at a sliding scale of taxation, they yell as if they were thumb-screwed: but five shillings in the pound goes to the kitchen as a matter of course—to puff those pompous idiots! and the parsons, who should be preaching against this sheer waste of food and perversion of the strength of the nation, as a public sin, are maundering about schism. There's another idle army! Then we have artists, authors, lawyers, doctors—the honourable professions! all hanging upon wealth, all ageing the rich, and all bearing upon labour! it's incubus on incubus. In point of fact, the rider's too heavy for the horse in England.'

He began to nibble at bread.

Rosamund pushed over to him a plate of the celebrated Steynham pie, of her own invention, such as no douse in the county of Sussex could produce or imitate.

'What would you have the parsons do?' she said.

'Take the rich by the throat and show them in the kitchen-mirror that they're swine running down to the sea with a devil in them.' She had set him off again, but she had enticed him to eating. 'Pooh! it has all been said before. Stones are easier to move than your English. May I be forgiven for saying it! an invasion is what they want to bring them to their senses. I'm sick of the work. Why

should I be denied—am I to kill the woman I love that I may go on hammering at them? Their idea of liberty is, an evasion of public duty. Dr. Shrapnel's right—it's a money-logged Island! Men like the Earl of Romfrey, who have never done work in their days except to kill bears and birds, I say they're stifled by wealth: and he at least would have made an Admiral of mark, or a General: not of much value, but useful in case of need. But he, like a pretty woman, was under no obligation to contribute more than an ornamental person to the common good. As to that, we count him by tens of thousands now, and his footmen and maids by hundreds of thousands. The rich love the nation through their possessions; otherwise they have no country. If they loved the country they would care for the people. Their hearts are eaten up by property. I am bidden to hold my tongue because I have no knowledge. When men who have this "knowledge" will go down to the people, speak to them, consult and argue with them, and come into suitable relations with them—I don't say of lords and retainers, but of knowers and doers, leaders and followers—out of consideration for public safety, if not for the common good, I shall hang back gladly; though I won't hear misstatements. My fault is, that I am too moderate. I should respect myself more if I deserved their hatred. This flood of luxury, which is, as Dr. Shrapnel says, the body's drunkenness and the soul's death, cries for execration. I'm too moderate. But I shall quit the country: I've no place here.'

Rosamund ahemed. 'France, Nevil? I should hardly think that France would please you, in the present state of things over there.'

Half cynically, with great satisfaction, she had watched him fretting at the savoury morsels of her pie with a fork like a sparrow-beak during the monologue that would have been so dreary to her but for her appreciation of the wholesome effect of the letting off of steam, and her admiration of the fire of his eyes. After finishing his plate he had less the look of a ship driving on to reef—some of his images of the country. He called for claret and water, sighing as he munched bread in vast portions, evidently conceiving that to eat unbuttered bread was to abstain from luxury. He praised passingly the quality of the bread. It came from Steynham, and so did the, milk and cream, the butter, chicken and eggs. He was good enough not to object to the expenditure upon the transmission of the accustomed dainties. Altogether the gradual act of nibbling had conduced to his eating remarkably well-royally. Rosamund's more than half-cynical ideas of men, and her custom of wringing unanimous verdicts from a jury of temporary impressions, inclined her to imagine him a lover that had not to be so very much condoled with, and a politician less alarming in practice than in theory:—somewhat a gentleman of domestic tirades on politics: as it is observed of your generous young Radical of birth and fortune, that he will become on the old high road to a round Conservatism.

He pitched one of the morning papers to the floor in disorderly sheets, muttering: 'So they're at me!'

'Is Dr. Shrapnel better?' she asked. 'I hold to a good appetite as a sign of a man's recovery.'

Beauchamp was confronting the fog at the window. He swung round: 'Dr.

Shrapnel is better. He has a particularly clever young female cook.'

'Ah! then . . .'

'Yes, then, naturally! He would naturally hasten to recover to partake of the viands, ma'am.'

Rosamund murmured of her gladness that he should be able to enjoy them.

'Oddly enough, he is not an eater of meat,' said Beauchamp.

'A vegetarian!'

'I beg you not to mention the fact to my lord. You see, you yourself can scarcely pardon it. He does not exclude flesh from his table. Blackburn Tuckham dined there once. "You are a thorough revolutionist, Dr. Shrapnel," he observed. The doctor does not exclude wine, but he does not drink it. Poor Tuckham went away entirely opposed to a Radical he could not even meet as a boon-fellow. I begged him not to mention the circumstances, as I have begged you. He pledged me his word to that effect solemnly; he correctly felt that if the truth were known, there would be further cause for the reprobation of the man who had been his host.'

'And that poor girl, Nevil?'

'Miss Denham? She contracted the habit of eating meat at school, and drinking wine in Paris, and continues it, occasionally. Now run upstairs. Insist on food. Inform Madame de Rouaillout that her brother M. le comte de Croisnel will soon be here, and should not find her ill. Talk to her as you women can talk. Keep the blinds down in her room; light a dozen wax-candles. Tell her I have no thought but of her. It's a lie: of no woman but of her: that you may say. But that you can't say. You can say I am devoted—ha, what stuff! I've only to open my mouth!— say nothing of me: let her think the worst—unless it comes to a question of her life: then be a merciful good woman . . .' He squeezed her fingers, communicating his muscular tremble to her sensitive woman's frame, and electrically convincing her that he was a lover.

She went up-stairs. In ten minutes she descended, and found him pacing up and down the hall. 'Madame de Rouaillout is much the same,' she said. He nodded, looked up the stairs, and about for his hat and gloves, drew on the gloves, fixed the buttons, blinked at his watch, and settled his hat as he was accustomed to wear it, all very methodically, and talking rapidly, but except for certain precise directions, which were not needed by so careful a housekeeper and nurse as Rosamund was known to be, she could not catch a word of meaning. He had some appointment, it seemed; perhaps he was off for a doctor—a fresh instance of his masculine incapacity to understand patient endurance. After opening the housedoor, and returning to the foot of the stairs, listening and sighing, he disappeared.

It struck her that he was trying to be two men at once.

The litter of newspaper sheets in the morning-room brought his exclamation to her mind: 'They're at me!' Her eyes ran down the columns, and were seized by the print of his name in large type. A leading article was devoted to Commander's Beauchamp's recent speech delivered in the great manufacturing town of Gunningham, at a meeting under the presidency of the mayor, and his replies to particular questions addressed to him; one being, what right did he conceive himself to have to wear the Sovereign's uniform in professing Republican opinions? Rosamund winced for her darling during her first perusal of the article. It was of the sarcastically caressing kind, masterly in ease of style, as the flourish of the executioner well may be with poor Bare-back hung up to a leisurely administration of the scourge. An allusion to 'Jack on shore' almost persuaded her that his uncle Everard had inspired the writer of the article. Beauchamp's reply to the question of his loyalty was not quoted: he was, however, complimented on his frankness. At the same time he was assured that his error lay in a too great proneness to make distinctions, and that there was no distinction between sovereign and country in a loyal and contented land, which could thank him for gallant services in war, while taking him for the solitary example to be cited at the present period of the evils of a comparatively long peace.

'Doubtless the tedium of such a state to a man of the temperament of the gallant commander,' etc., the termination of the article was indulgent. Rosamund recurred to the final paragraph for comfort, and though she loved Beauchamp, the test of her representative feminine sentiment regarding his political career, when personal feeling on his behalf had subsided, was, that the writer of the article must have received an intimation to deal both smartly and forbearingly with the offender: and from whom but her lord? Her notions of the conduct of the Press were primitive. In a summary of the article Beauchamp was treated as naughty boy, formerly brave boy, and likely by-and-by to be good boy. Her secret heart would have spoken similarly, with more emphasis on the flattering terms.

A telegram arrived from her lord. She was bidden to have the house clear for him by noon of the next day.

How could that be done?

But to write blankly to inform the Earl of Romfrey that he was excluded from his own house was another impossibility.

'Hateful man!' she apostrophized Captain Baskellett, and sat down, supporting her chin in a prolonged meditation.

The card of a French lady, bearing the name of Madame d'Auffray, was handed to her.

Beauchamp had gone off to his friend Lydiard, to fortify himself in his resolve to reply to that newspaper article by eliciting counsel to the contrary. Phrase by phrase he fought through the first half of his composition of the reply against Lydiard, yielding to him on a point or two of literary judgement, only the more vehemently to maintain his ideas of discretion, which were, that he would not take shelter behind a single subterfuge; that he would try this question nakedly, though he should stand alone; that he would stake his position on it, and establish his right to speak his opinions: and as for unseasonable times, he protested it was the cry of a gorged middle-class, frightened of further action, and making snug with compromise. Would it be a seasonable time when there was uproar? Then it would be a time to be silent on such themes: they could be discussed calmly now, and without danger; and whether he was hunted or not, he cared nothing. He declined to consider the peculiar nature of Englishmen: they must hear truth or perish.

Knowing the difficulty once afflicting Beauchamp in the art of speaking on politics tersely, Lydiard was rather astonished at his well-delivered cannonade; and he fancied that his modesty had been displaced by the new acquirement; not knowing the nervous fever of his friend's condition, for which the rattle of speech was balm, and contention a native element, and the assumption of truth a necessity. Beauchamp hugged his politics like some who show their love of the pleasures of life by taking to them angrily. It was all he had: he had given up all for it. He forced Lydiard to lay down his pen and walk back to the square with him, and went on arguing, interjecting, sneering, thumping the old country, raising and oversetting her, treating her alternately like a disrespected grandmother, and like a woman anciently beloved; as a dead lump, and as a garden of seeds; reviewing prominent political men, laughing at the dwarf-giants; finally casting anchor on a Mechanics' Institute that he had recently heard of, where working men met weekly for the purpose of reading the British poets.

'That's the best thing I've heard of late,' he said, shaking Lydiard's hand on the door-steps.

'Ah! You're Commander Beauchamp; I think I know you. I've seen you on a platform,' cried a fresh-faced man in decent clothes, halting on his way along the pavement; 'and if you were in your uniform, you damned Republican dog! I'd strip you with my own hands, for the disloyal scoundrel you are, with your pimping Republicanism and capsizing everything in a country like Old England. It's the cat-o'-nine-tails you want, and the bosen to lay on; and I'd do it myself. And mind me, when next I catch sight of you in blue and gold lace, I'll compel you to show cause why you wear it, and prove your case, or else I'll make a Cupid of you, and no joke about it. I don't pay money for a nincompoop to outrage my feelings of respect and loyalty, when he's in my pay, d' ye hear? You're in my pay: and you do your duty, or I'll kick ye out of it. It's no empty threat. You look out for your next public speech, if it's anywhere within forty mile of London. Get along.'

With a scowl, and a very ugly 'yah!' worthy of cannibal jaws, the man passed off.

Beauchamp kept eye on him. 'What class does a fellow like that come of?'

'He's a harmless enthusiast,' said Lydiard. 'He has been reading the article, and has got excited over it.'

'I wish I had the fellow's address.' Beauchamp looked wistfully at Lydiard, but he did not stimulate the generous offer to obtain it for him. Perhaps it was as well to forget the fellow.

'You see the effect of those articles,' he said.

'You see what I mean by unseasonable times,' Lydiard retorted.

'He didn't talk like a tradesman,' Beauchamp mused.

'He may be one, for all that. It's better to class him as an enthusiast.'

'An enthusiast!' Beauchamp stamped: 'for what?'

'For the existing order of things; for his beef and ale; for the titles he is accustomed to read in the papers. You don't study your countrymen.'

'I'd study that fellow, if I had the chance.'

'You would probably find him one of the emptiest, with a rather worse temper than most of them.'

Beauchamp shook Lydiard's hand, saying, 'The widow?'

'There's no woman like her!'

'Well, now you're free—why not? I think I put one man out of the field.'

'Too early! Besides—'

'Repeat that, and you may have to say too late.'

'When shall you go down to Bevisham?'

'When? I can't tell: when I've gone through fire. There never was a home for me like the cottage, and the old man, and the dear good girl— the best of girls! if you hadn't a little spoilt her with your philosophy of the two sides of the case.'

'I've not given her the brains.'

'She's always doubtful of doing, doubtful of action: she has no will. So she is fatalistic, and an argument between us ends in her submitting, as if she must submit to me, because I'm overbearing, instead of accepting the fact.'

'She feels your influence.'

'She's against the publication of THE DAWN—for the present. It's an "unseasonable time." I argue with her: I don't get hold of her mind a bit; but at last she says, "very well." She has your head.'

And you have her heart, Lydiard could have rejoined.

They said good-bye, neither of them aware of the other's task of endurance.

As they were parting, Beauchamp perceived his old comrade Jack Wilmore walking past.

'Jack!' he called.

Wilmore glanced round. 'How do you do, Beauchamp?'

'Where are you off to, Jack?'

'Down to the Admiralty. I'm rather in a hurry; I have an appointment.'

'Can't you stop just a minute?'

'I'm afraid I can't. Good morning.'

It was incredible; but this old friend, the simplest heart alive, retreated without a touch of his hand, and with a sorely wounded air.

'That newspaper article appears to have been generally read,' Beauchamp said to Lydiard, who answered:

'The article did not put the idea of you into men's minds, but gave tongue to it: you may take it for an instance of the sagacity of the Press.'

'You wouldn't take that man and me to have been messmates for years!'

Old Jack Wilmore! Don't go, Lydiard.'

Lydiard declared that he was bound to go: he was engaged to read Italian for an hour with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.

'Then go, by all means,' Beauchamp dismissed him.

He felt as if he had held a review of his friends and enemies on the door-step, and found them of one colour. If it was an accident befalling him in a London square during a space of a quarter of an hour, what of the sentiments of universal England? Lady Barbara's elopement with Lord Alfred last year did not rouse much execration; hardly worse than gossip and compassion. Beauchamp drank a great deal of bitterness from his reflections.

They who provoke huge battles, and gain but lame victories over themselves, insensibly harden to the habit of distilling sour thoughts from their mischances and from most occurrences. So does the world they combat win on them.

'For,' says Dr. Shrapnel, 'the world and nature, which are opposed in relation to our vital interests, each agrees to demand of us a perfect victory, on pain otherwise of proving it a stage performance; and the victory over the world, as over nature, is over self: and this victory lies in yielding perpetual service to the world, and none to nature: for the world has to be wrought out, nature to be subdued.'

The interior of the house was like a change of elements to Beauchamp. He had never before said to himself, 'I have done my best, and I am beaten!' Outside of it, his native pugnacity had been stimulated; but here, within the walls where Renee lay silently breathing, barely breathing, it might be dying, he was overcome, and left it to circumstance to carry him to a conclusion. He went upstairs to the drawing-room, where he beheld Madame d'Auffray in conversation with Rosamund.

'I was assured by Madame la Comtesse that I should see you to-day,' the French lady said as she swam to meet him; 'it is a real pleasure': and pressing his hand she continued, 'but I fear you will be disappointed of seeing my sister. She would rashly try your climate at its worst period. Believe me, I do not join in decrying it, except on her account: I could have forewarned her of an English Winter and early Spring. You know her impetuosity; suddenly she decided on accepting the invitation of Madame la Comtesse; and though I have no fears of her health, she is at present a victim of the inclement weather.'

'You have seen her, madame?' said Beauchamp. So well had the clever lady played the dupe that he forgot there was a part for him to play. Even the acquiescence of Rosamund in the title of countess bewildered him.

'Madame d'Auffray has been sitting for an hour with Madame de Rouaillout,' said Rosamund. He spoke of Roland's coming.

'Ah?' said Madame d'Auffray, and turned to Rosamund: 'you have determined to surprise us: then you will have a gathering of the whole family in your hospitable house, Madame la Comtesse!

'If M. la Marquis will do it that honour, madame!

'My brother is in London,' Madame d'Auffray said to Beauchamp.

The shattering blow was merited by one who could not rejoice that he had acted rightly.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE EARL OF ROMFREY AND THE COUNTESS

An extraordinary telegraphic message, followed by a still more extraordinary letter the next morning, from Rosamund Culling, all but interdicted the immediate occupation of his house in town to Everard, now Earl of Romfrey. She begged him briefly not to come until after the funeral, and proposed to give him good reasons for her request at their meeting. 'I repeat, I pledge myself to satisfy you on this point,' she wrote. Her tone was that of one of your heroic women of history refusing to surrender a fortress.

Everard's wrath was ever of a complexion that could suffer postponements without his having to fear an abatement of it. He had no business to transact in London, and he had much at the Castle, so he yielded himself up to his new sensations, which are not commonly the portion of gentlemen of his years. He anticipated that Nevil would at least come down to the funeral, but there was no appearance of him, nor a word to excuse his absence. Cecil was his only supporter. They walked together between the double ranks of bare polls of the tenantry and peasantry, resembling in a fashion old Froissart engravings the earl used to dote on in his boyhood, representing bodies of manacled citizens, whose humbled heads looked like nuts to be cracked, outside the gates of captured French towns, awaiting the disposition of their conqueror, with his banner above him and prancing knights around. That was a glory of the past. He had no successor. The thought was chilling; the solitariness of childlessness to an aged man, chief of a most ancient and martial House, and proud of his blood, gave him the statue's outlook on a desert, and made him feel that he was no more than a whirl of the dust, settling to the dust.

He listened to the parson curiously and consentingly. We are ashes. Ten centuries had come to an end in him to prove the formula correct. The chronicle of the House would state that the last Earl of Romfrey left no heir.

Cecil was a fine figure walking beside him. Measured by feet, he might be a worthy holder of great lands. But so heartily did the earl despise this nephew that he never thought of trying strength with the fellow, and hardly cared to know what his value was, beyond his immediate uses as an instrument to strike with. Beauchamp of Romfrey had been his dream, not Baskellett: and it increased his disgust of Beauchamp that Baskellett should step forward as the man. No doubt Cecil would hunt the county famously: he would preserve game with the sleepless eye of a General of the Jesuits. These things were to be considered.

Two days after the funeral Lord Romfrey proceeded to London. He was met at the station by Rosamund, and informed that his house was not yet vacated by the French family.

'And where have you arranged for me to go, ma'am?' he asked her complacently.

She named an hotel where she had taken rooms for him.

He nodded, and was driven to the hotel, saying little on the road.

As she expected, he was heavily armed against her and Nevil.

'You're the slave of the fellow, ma'am. You are so infatuated that you second his amours, in my house. I must wait for a clearance, it seems.'

He cast a comical glance of disapprobation on the fittings of the hotel apartment, abhorring gilt.

'They leave us the day after to-morrow,' said Rosamund, out of breath with nervousness at the commencement of the fray, and skipping over the opening ground of a bold statement of facts. 'Madame de Rouaillout has been unwell. She is not yet recovered; she has just risen. Her sister-in-law has nursed her. Her husband seems much broken in health; he is perfect on the points of courtesy.'

'That is lucky, ma'am.'

'Her brother, Nevil's comrade in the war, was there also.'

'Who came first?'

'My lord, you have only heard Captain Baskett's version of the story.

She has been my guest since the first day of her landing in England.

There cannot possibly be an imputation on her.'

'Ma'am, if her husband manages to be satisfied, what on earth have I to do with it?'

'I am thinking of Nevil, my lord.'

'You're never thinking of any one else, ma'am.'

'He sleeps here, at this hotel. He left the house to Madame de

Rouaillout. I bear witness to that.'

'You two seem to have made your preparations to stand a criminal trial.'

'It is pure truth, my lord.'

'Do you take me to be anxious about the fellow's virtue?'

'She is a lady who would please you.'

'A scandal in my house does not please me.'

'The only approach to a scandal was made by Captain Baskett.'

'A poor devil locked out of his bed on a Winter's night hullabaloo with pretty good reason.

I suppose he felt the contrast.'

'My lord, this lady did me the honour to come to me on a visit. I have not previously presumed to entertain a friend. She probably formed no estimate of my exact position.'

The earl with a gesture implied Rosamund's privilege to act the hostess to friends.

'You invited her?' he said.

'That is, I had told her I hoped she would come to England.'

'She expected you to be at the house in town on her arrival?'

'It was her impulse to come.'

'She came alone?'

'She may have desired to be away from her own people for a time: there may have been domestic differences. These cases are delicate.'

'This case appears to have been so delicate that you had to lock out a fourth party.'

'It is indelicate and base of Captain Baskett to complain and to hint. Nevil had to submit to the same; and Captain Baskett took his revenge on the hosedoor and the bells. The house was visited by the police next morning.'

'Do you suspect him to have known you were inside the house that night?'

She could not say so: but hatred of Cecil urged her past the bounds of habitual reticence to put it to her lord whether he, imagining the worst, would have behaved like Cecil.

To this he did not reply, but remarked, 'I am sorry he annoyed you, ma'am.'

'It is not the annoyance to me; it is the shocking, the unmanly insolence to a lady, and a foreign lady.'

'That's a matter between him and Nevil. I uphold him.'

'Then, my lord, I am silent.'

Silent she remained; but Lord Romfrey was also silent: and silence being a weapon of offence only when it is practised by one out of two, she had to reflect whether in speaking no further she had finished her business.

'Captain Baskett stays at the Castle?' she asked.

'He likes his quarters there.'

'Nevil could not go down to Romfrey, my lord. He was obliged to wait, and see, and help me to entertain, her brother and her husband.'

'Why, ma'am? But I have no objection to his making the marquis a happy husband.'

'He has done what few men would have done, that she may be a self-respecting wife.'

'The parson's in that fellow!' Lord Romfrey exclaimed. 'Now I have the story. She came to him, he declined the gift, and you were turned into the curtain for them. If he had only been off with her, he would have done the country good service. Here he's a failure and a nuisance; he's a common cock-shy for the journals. I'm tired of hearing of him; he's a stench in our nostrils. He's tired of the woman.'

'He loves her.'

'Ma'am, you're hoodwinked. If he refused to have her, there 's a something he loves better. I don't believe we've bred a downright lackadaisical donkey in our family: I know him. He's not a fellow for abstract morality: I know him. It's bargain against bargain with him; I'll do him that justice. I hear he has ordered the removal of the Jersey bull from Holdesbury, and the beast is mine,' Lord Romfrey concluded in a lower key.

'Nevil has taken him.'

'Ha! pull and pull, then!'

'He contends that he is bound by a promise to give an American gentleman the refusal of the bull, and you must sign an engagement to keep the animal no longer than two years.'

'I sign no engagement. I stick to the bull.'

'Consent to see Nevil to-night, my lord.'

'When he has apologized to you, I may, ma'am.'

'Surely he did more, in requesting me to render him a service.'

'There's not a creature living that fellow wouldn't get to serve him, if he knew the trick. We should all of us be marching on London at Shrapnel's heels. The political mania is just as incurable as hydrophobia, and he's bitten. That's clear.'

'Bitten perhaps: but not mad. As you have always contended, the true case is incurable, but it is very rare: and is this one?'

'It's uncommonly like a true case, though I haven't seen him foam at the mouth, and shun water—as his mob does.'

Rosamund restrained some tears, betraying the effort to hide the moisture. 'I am no match for you, my lord. I try to plead on his behalf;—I do worse than if I were dumb. This I most earnestly say: he is the Nevil Beauchamp who fought for his country, and did not abandon her cause, though he stood there—we had it from Colonel Halkett—a skeleton: and he is the Nevil who—I am poorly paying my debt to him! —defended me from the aspersions of his cousin.'

'Boys!' Lord Romfrey ejaculated.

'It is the same dispute between them as men.'

'Have you forgotten my proposal to shield you from liars and scandalmongers?'

'Could I ever forget it?' Rosamund appeared to come shining out of a cloud. 'Princeliest and truest gentleman, I thought you then, and I know you to be, my dear lord. I fancied I had lived the scandal down. I was under the delusion that I had grown to be past backbiting: and that no man could stand before me to insult and vilify me. But, for a woman in any so-called doubtful position, it seems that the coward will not be wanting to strike her. In quitting your service, I am able to affirm that only once during the whole term of it have I consciously overstepped the line of my duties: it was for Nevil: and Captain Baskett undertook to defend your reputation, in consequence.'

'Has the rascal been questioning your conduct?' The earl frowned.

'Oh, no! not questioning: he does not question, he accuses: he never doubted: and what he went shouting as a boy, is plain matter of fact to him now. He is devoted to you. It was for your sake that he desired me to keep my name from being mixed up in a scandal he foresaw the occurrence of in your house.'

'He permitted himself to sneer at you?'

'He has the art of sneering. On this occasion he wished to be direct and personal.'

'What sort of hints were they?'

Lord Romfrey strode away from her chair that the answer might be easy to her, for she was red, and evidently suffering from shame as well as indignation.

'The hints we call distinct.' said Rosamund.

'In words?'

'In hard words.'

'Then you won't meet Cecil?'

Such a question, and the tone of indifference in which it came, surprised and revolted her so that the unreflecting reply leapt out:

'I would rather meet a devil.'

Of how tremblingly, vehemently, and hastily she had said it, she was unaware. To her lord it was an outcry of nature, astutely touched by him to put her to proof.

He continued his long leisurely strides, nodding over his feet.

Rosamund stood up. She looked a very noble figure in her broad black-furred robe. 'I have one serious confession to make, sir.'

'What's that?' said he.

'I would avoid it, for it cannot lead to particular harm; but I have an enemy who may poison your ear in my absence. And first I resign my position. I have forfeited it.'

'Time goes forward, ma'am, and you go round. Speak to the point. Do you mean that you toss up the reins of my household?'

'I do. You trace it to Nevil immediately?'

'I do. The fellow wants to upset the country, and he begins with me.'

'You are wrong, my lord. What I have done places me at Captain Baskellett's mercy. It is too loathsome to think of: worse than the whip; worse than your displeasure. It might never be known; but the thought that it might gives me courage. You have said that to protect a woman everything is permissible. It is your creed, my lord, and because the world, I have heard you say, is unjust and implacable to women. In some cases, I think so too. In reality I followed your instructions; I mean, your example. Cheap chivalry on my part! But it pained me not a little. I beg to urge that in my defence.'

'Well, ma'am, you have tied the knot tight enough; perhaps now you'll cut it,' said the earl.

Rosamund gasped softly. 'M. le Marquis is a gentleman who, after a life of dissipation, has been reminded by bad health that he has a young and beautiful wife.'

'He dug his pit to fall into it:—he's jealous?'

She shook her head to indicate the immeasurable.

'Senile jealousy is anxious to be deceived. He could hardly be deceived so far as to imagine that Madame la Marquise would visit me, such as I am, as my guest. Knowingly or not, his very clever sister, a good woman, and a friend to husband and wife—a Frenchwoman of the purest type—gave me the title. She insisted on it, and I presumed to guess that she deemed it necessary for the sake of peace in that home.'

Lord Romfrey appeared merely inquisitive; his eyebrows were lifted in permanence; his eyes were mild.

She continued: 'They leave England in a few hours. They are not likely to return. I permitted him to address me with the title of countess.'

'Of Romfrey?' said the earl.

Rosamund bowed.

His mouth contracted. She did not expect thunder to issue from it, but she did fear to hear a sarcasm, or that she would have to endure a deadly silence: and she was gathering her own lips in imitation of his, to nerve herself for some stroke to come, when he laughed in his peculiar close-mouthed manner.

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